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ABSTRACT

This handbook discusses the role, structures, organization, and management of study centers as they operate in different postsecondary settings in the Asia Pacific region. Eight chapters and a postscript are included: (1) introduction; (2) what is a study center; (3) why might an institution want study centers--functions, architectural types, staffing/management, study center systems, and examples of study center types; (4) why might students want study centers--distance education philosophy, student demographic characteristics, sociological factors, educational technology, and administration convenience; (5) how might study centers be set up--minimizing distance and reducing isolation, learning facilities access, improving communications, and cost reduction; (6) what rooms, equipment, and materials might be needed in a study center; (7) what staff might be required in a study center--management structure and function, recruitment and training, and service terms; and (8) how might study centers be linked with main campuses--management structures, communications systems, conferences, and routines. The postscript emphasizes the need for individuality of the study centers. Photographs, tables, and diagrams are included. An annotated bibliography contains 10 citations, and 43 additional citations are provided. (NLA)

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PREFACE

This handbook on distance education study centre is one in a series of monographs and reports on higher education to be brought out under Unesco-UNDP Project - Regional Technical Co-operation in Higher Education for Development in Asia and the Pacific. Distance education associated with the open university philosophy is emerging as a major means of broadening access to higher education in this region. The trend will invariably continue. Study centres are used by many of the distance education institutions as an integral part of their provision of teaching, support service and facilities to students. The role of study centres in distance education systems is multi-dimensional depending upon the contexts in which they are embedded.

Broadly, the handbook based on known experiences, attempts to discuss the role, structures, organization and management of study centres as they operate in different settings. A short description of a few study centres as examples is also provided. An annotated bibliography is included at the end of the text.

Unesco expresses its thanks and appreciation to Judith A. Timmins and A. Ivan Williams of the University College of Southern Queensland, Australia who have authored the publication. Unesco's gratitude is also due to the contributions of participants of a regional workshop on the same subject organized by Unesco in 1987 which have been reflected in the text.

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Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

The nature of distance education

The many definitions of "distance education" have in common the explanation of "distance" as being the geographic separation of learner and teacher. That separation may be also in terms of time. There is a very useful "definition" given by Chang et al (1983):

> "A system of (distance) learning especially suited to students only able or willing to devote part of their time to their studies, and, moreover, not generally capable of studying at fixed times or places".

In so far as distance education involves "teaching", it must have as its basis the communicating with the learners of what the teachers consider should be studied. In most distance education systems this is done mainly through the "study materials" which may utilize a variety of media, and which are expertly designed to promote effective learning.

Despite careful preparation and presentation of the study materials it has become evident that many distance learners require contact with teaching staff and para-academic during the time they are studying to encourage their persistence and assist their learning. Most distance education systems therefore provide support for the students. This provision takes a great variety of forms and may involve the utilization of study centres.

Part of the support for the students is the provision of various means of assessing learning. This allows the student to monitor what is being learned and/or allows the teacher to make such a judgment. Such assessment is an essential element if the "teacher" is to give some form of public "credit" to the learning accomplished.

The providing of distance education therefore, involves three main components:

- the preparation and delivery of study materials;
- the provision of study support;
- the assessment of learning.

Obviously to accomplish these efficiently and effectively a distance education system must be also well planned and managed, so management and a suitable infrastructure are also components.

Variations on a theme

Each of the components of distance education listed above varies greatly in nature and significance from one distance education system to another. The nature of each depends on the philosophy of the education espoused by the institutions and their perceptions of the real needs (as distinct from wants) of the learners.

The systems range from approximating as closely as possible to traditional face-to-face teaching/learning, at the one extreme, to as much learner-independence as possible at the other. Even at the latter end of the continuum there are great contrasts of provision. Some institutions supply to the students a prescription of the course of study, recommended reading lists, and the opportunity to purchase past examination papers. Other produce comprehensive, "user friendly", carefully designed, multi-media packages of study materials of high aesthetic and physical quality. Some distance

education courses may involve no means of assessing learning until the final examination, while others may include frequent self-assessment exercises (with model answers), several assignments to be submitted for tutor-marking (and therefore for on-going "teaching" through tutor comments), as well as final examination. Some distance education systems may offer virtually no student support whatever apart from answering administrative-type queries. At the other extreme are systems supplying to individual students all the materials they need to succeed in their studies without any contacts with other students or staff being necessary except through submitted assignments. Such systems may also offer a variety of other ways in which students may enrich their studies should they be able or wish to choose to use them. Some of these enrichments may be accessed by students in their own homes, some may be offered on the main campuses of distance teaching institutions, many are likely to be provided through study centres.

In recent years educators have been paying more attention to encouraging and enabling learners to take charge of their own studies, to become independent learners, and to have confidence in their ability to pursue life-long learning. Distance education can provide all of the direction, scheduling, and support systems most students seem to need at first and which some continue to rely on. If it is within an open-learning context, distance education can also allow students to determine their own degrees of independence. Indeed the aim of a distance education system might be to move students from a need to have maximum contact with staff to a need for very little.

A distance education system can be planned to grow in complexity and in richness of educational provision. It may start by providing for students the basic materials they need for successful learning. Over time it can add increasing enrichments of learning experiences to be enjoyed by individuals at home and through visiting

study centres. Thus the study centres may have an academic function. Frequently study centres also have important administrative functions such as advertising courses, enrolling students, collecting fees, and organizing examinations.

Some distance educators in technologically advanced countries believe that study centres are ephemeral features of distance education systems. They believe that "the focus of student support will revert to the central teaching institutions" in the long term (King, 1988). This would occur in response to students having access to affordable resources in their homes. It is suggested by the authors of this handbook that for many parts of the world it will be decades before such communication technology is available sufficiently readily for study centres of proven worth to be abandoned. Another possibility envisaged (King 1988) is that student support services may become privatized commercial enterprises.

The study centre concept within distance education

Study centres perform a great variety of functions. They have many physical natures, are staffed in many different ways, have varying administrative structures and all sorts of relationships with parent institutions and local communities. They may be little more than local distribution centres or convenient communication intermediaries between the teaching institution and its students. They may be multi-function regional foci of higher education contributing to the services of several distance institutions.

Study centres may be outposts of higher education institutions only marginally integrated with other local educational provisions. Or they may be significantly integrated with schools and colleges, divisional education offices and personnel, guidance and career-counselling services and so on. Their standing in a local area will depend to a great extent on the educational policy of the parent

institution. Experience shows that the local community may be prepared to provide premises, share rental charges and costs such as lighting and cleaning, (see, for example, the Indira Gandi Open University's study centres. (Anjanappa, 1989).

What a study centre is and what it does depends on the philosophy of distance education held by the parent institution, and especially on the beliefs about the amount and nature of student support that should be provided or are considered appropriate to the level of study being pursued. As will become apparent in the handbook, the term itself may be very misleading in that very little "study" per se may be done there. In Australia, for example, study centres are more for support and access for students than for study. (Dekkers et al, 1988).

Chapter Two

WHAT IS A STUDY CENTRE ?

The range of possible functions

Three main components of a distance education system were identified in Chapter One: the preparation and delivery of study materials, the provision of student support, and the assessment of learning. Study centres may contribute to all three of these components in various ways and to varying degrees.

A more useful classification of the functions of study centres however, is as follows:

Administrative functions.

The administrative functions of study centres may involve student affairs:

- publicizing study opportunities;
- informing and counselling individuals;
- enrolling and registration
- fee collection;
- maintaining records of students' status, progression, results, course forward planning, assignments traffic;
- explicating rules, academic and administrative regulations, ethos and mores of the parent institution;
- evaluation.

The administrative functions may involve handling study materials:

- reception, storage, packing/assembling, dispatch to or preparation for collection by students;
- maintaining stocks and records and estimating future needs
- financial accountability for any materials sold.

Administrative functions will include the proper management of the study centre's facilities:

- the fabric of the premises and the surrounds;
- furniture and equipment;
- expendable supplies of materials;
- power, water, communication supplies'
- personnel;
- safety, security and cleaning;
- financial management.

Academic functions.

The academic functions of study centres may involve:

- counselling on general academic matters before enrolment and during the progress of study, sometimes involving detailed advice on individual subjects, and careers counselling;
- providing study skills advice and courses, arranging local teaching/tutoring, managing and monitoring it and student attendance, and assessing its cost-effectiveness;

- arranging for teaching visits of staff from the parent institution:
  a) the timetable, attendance of students;
  b) venues and equipment/materials;
  c) evaluation of cost effectiveness.
- organization of study space and facilities for students who need:
  a) quietness for private study;
  b) access to resources such as reference materials (text, audio, video, computer), equipment (scientific, audio, video);
  c) discussion with other students, informal or organized peer - tutorials.
- administering teaching in real time at a distance through:
  a) telephone (and/or satellite) links for sound only, sound and picture, sound and picture-and-interactive-computer screen transmissions;
  b) computer conferencing;
  c) television broadcasts, one-way or interactive.
- monitoring student progress during a study period and taking action to provide encouragement and support when necessary;
- organizing final examinations: venues, furniture and materials, supervision, security of papers and scripts, record keeping, dispatch of scripts for making;

- investigating local demand for non-credit/continuing education courses and activities (consistent with their higher education role and arranging to meet those wishes, including, when necessary, the financial management of the activities organized.

Social functions

Study centres may have a wide range of social functions prescribed by the parent institution, expected by the local community, engendered by the students using them, and arising inevitably because they are there.

Functions prescribed by the parent institution may include:

- mirroring the institution itself, providing a mini-campus experience for users and reflecting the ethos, ambiance, expectations, of the main campus, thus contributing to the institutional socializing of the students;
- representing the parent institution locally at formal and informal functions;
- facilitating and organizing occasions relevant to its academic functions and those of its parent institution, such as
  a) meetings of alumni;
  b) meetings of students' associations;
  c) graduation and other award ceremonies;
  d) pre-orientation and orientation sessions for students, parent and friends;
  e) careers and guidance meetings.

- exhibiting, distributing and holding for reference materials publicizing and explaining the mission, organization, and opportunities offered by the parent institution;
- disseminating to students and others, news of centre and campus activities.

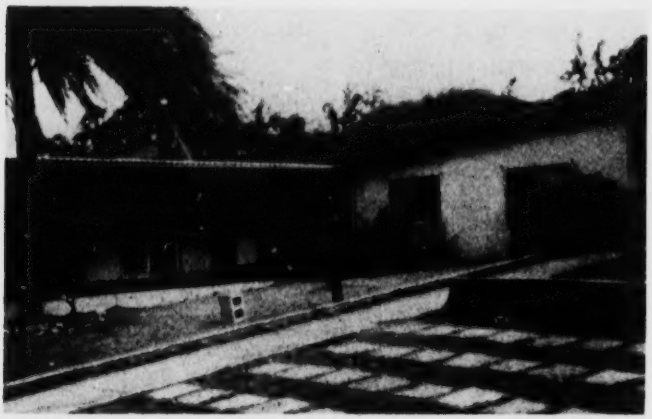
The local community may have expectations of the ways in which a study centre might function socially. It may serve to reduce the mystique of higher education study through its use by many and varied people. It may be viewed as a comfortably normal venue for all sorts of purposes from using its reference library, to meeting for tea or coffee at its canteen, to attending monthly meetings of clubs and societies in its classrooms. In this way a centre may make a valuable contribution to the democratizing of higher education.

The student-users of a study centre may initiate a variety of "social" uses of its facilities if they are allowed and encouraged. They may form a local association or union for mutual support and to represent their views to the institution. They may hold peer-tutorials and less formal, mutual, academic support meetings at the centre. They may be led to regard its as their "club" where serious academic pursuits may intermingle with informal socializing.

The range of architectural types

A study centre may consist of one room in a building that is only occasionally staffed, or it may be a campus with a number of purpose-designed buildings, permanently staffed for specialist teaching, technical, and administrative purposes, and open most days and times during the week. Its physical form will depend on the functions ascribed to it and on the funds available to provide for those functions at various levels of completeness and intensity.

The centre may be a "lodger" within the premises of another institution's facility possibly paying rent to cover space used, furniture and fittings provided, and power etc. consumed. Examples of centres of this sort are those of the University College of Southern Queensland which are located within colleges of the Technical and Further Education system of Australia, and those of the Indira Gandhi National Open University (Anjanappa, 1989). The University College of Southern Queensland has other centres which were integrally planned within a specially built multi-purpose educational complex. Such a study centre is found at the Hervey Bay Senior College which was planned and developed as a general post-secondary, community education facility. A similar example is the University of the South Pacific's regional centre in Tonga which is being integrated into the Tongan Community College, another purpose-built complex of multi-function.



The simply-designed but functional Antiqua Study Centre, University of the West Indies.

Some study centres occupy discrete buildings of an inexpensive, adapted architectural form. Thus the University of the South Pacific's centre in Nauru is a former civil service staff house, built of wood and having three small "bedrooms", "living-room" and "kitchen". Other centres represent ambitious, sophisticated, costly, and architecturally designed adaptations of existing buildings such as those of North Island College, Canada (Salter, 1982), or purpose-built mini-campuses such as the University of the South Pacific Centre, Vanuatu.

Many centres are of modest provision and architectural design reflecting their role, the population they serve, and the funds available for their construction and development. The Antigua Centre of the University of the West Indies is such a pleasant, functional, facility, as are the U.S.P. centres in Solomon Islands, Kiribati, and Tuvalu, the University of Papua New Guinea's centre on Bouganville, and the fourteen regional/study centres of the Open University of Sri Lanka.

An interesting species of study centre having functions similar in range to those already mentioned but very different in physical nature, are the mobile centres of North Island College (Salter, 1982). This is an interesting response to the needs of distance learning students for support in an area of scattered population which is mainly nucleated but where travel to study centres in the larger urban areas is difficult.

The range of staffing/management arrangements

Staffing

It follows almost axiomatically that study centres will exhibit a wide range of staffing phenomena. At one extreme is the single person, part-time, non-academic centre staff, and at the other a

Roma, Queensland, Australia

Liaison Staff at a small regional study centre. Computing and teleconference facilities are located in the library of Roma's combined senior high school/technical college.

specialist team of academic, administrative and technical people, staffing the centre full-time, mornings, afternoons and evenings, six or seven days of every week, with some in senior academic and managerial positions and others in clerical and labouring support jobs.

Some centres may be staffed by persons contracted to do so from members of a host institution by the centres' parent institution. This is how the University College of Southern Queensland runs its centre in the Chinese University of Hong Kong. The Open Learning Institute of British Columbia has centres staffed by an advisor and a half-or full-time clerical assistant according to need (Meakin, 1982). In contrast to this the "larger" centres of the University of the South Pacific, such as those in Solomon Islands and Tonga, have two or three academic staff at Lecturer or Senior Lecturer level, secretaries/administrative officers, librarians, a technician/satellite

operator, clerical support staff, cleaners and groundsmen. Similar strength of staffing is found in the centres of the Indira Gandhi Open University and the Open University of Sri Lanka.

In both of the last two institutions mentioned staffing and management is somewhat complex because their larger regional centres have oversight of smaller satellite study centres. Similar development on a lesser scale occurs when an institution seeks to serve smaller communities at some distance from its study centres through the establishment of local co-ordinators. Such is the case at the University of the South Pacific and the Canadian Open Learning Institute through the use of their part-time advisors, sometimes working out of their own homes (Meakin 1982).

Management

The ways in which study centres are managed constitute a continuum from complete direction from the main campus of the parent institution at the one end, to centres having considerable autonomy in many areas of activity at the other. There may be tight central control of some aspects of the work of centres and great room for local initiative in others. Even the funding of study centres may underscore this dichotomy as in the case of the University of the South Pacific whose regional centres have two financial accounts. One is subject to university regulation and auditing, and the other is administered by the directors of the centres and subject to the oversight of the centres' advisory committees (made up of local persons). The latter accounts are relatively small but may be augmented considerably by local initiatives of the centre staff, by local gifts, and by annual donation from overseas aid sources.

It is through the use of this second account that the University of the South Pacific centres have been able to undertaken much useful and exciting continuing education work, reviewing and stimulating traditional arts and crafts, encouraging and tutoring in-

digenous writers, poets, musicians, as well as running courses in contemporary studies and skills. These activities are managed almost exclusively by the centres though they have been strongly supported by the Director of Extension Services of the University.

The staff of study centres are invariably considered to be an integral part of the staff of the parent institution, enjoying the same rankings, prestige, and remuneration and employment conditions as those on campus. Thus their qualifications and professional behaviour can be expected to provide for the communities within which they work the image of the institution as determined by the institution.

Each centre has a head who is responsible for the management of all of the centre's functions and all aspects of its well-being within the rules, regulations and procedures laid down by the institution or body employing that person. An important aspect of the head's task is to maintain effective communications with that controlling body. In some distance education systems communications between centres may be important also for collaborative projects, mutual assistance (for example when students move from the area served by one centre to that of another, or to supply materials in stock in one centre and short in another), and to allow for collegiate decision-making.

The range of study centre systems

It is apparent that study centres are expressions of a distance education communication system instituted for the support of students. Each centre is linked upwards with the institution which gives it meaning and at least some degree of governance and direction. The simplest system of study centres therefore is expressed in the diagram below in which each centre, A, B, and C, is linked directly and only with the parent institution.

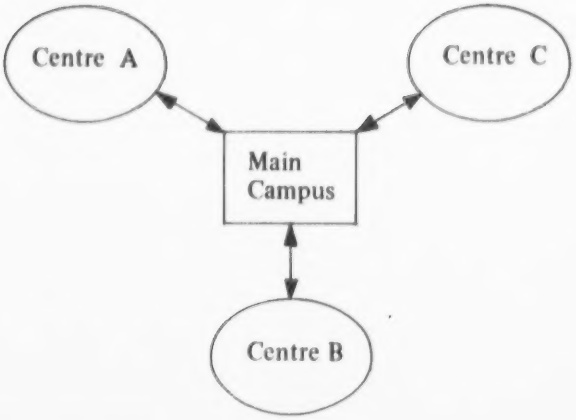


Diagram 2.1

For administrative purposes, this is the configuration of the UCSQ study centre system.

For teletutorials however, all centres with attending students are networked and the UCSQ system is then as in the diagram below.

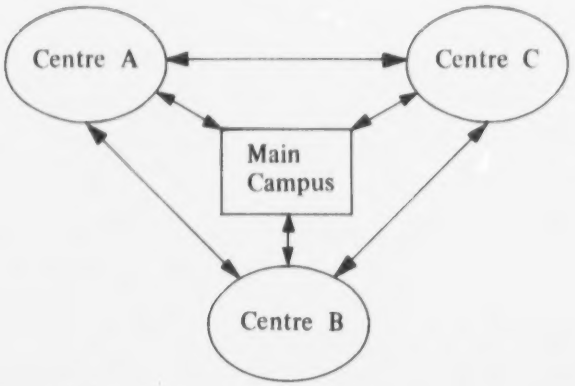


Diagram 2.2

Diagram 2.2 illustrates the normal configuration of the network of nine study centres and two main campuses of the University of the South Pacific for administrative, academic, and social purposes.

A third pattern comes from the inclusion of sub-centres (or of "study centres" vis a vis "regional centres" in the case of the Indira Gandhi Open University for example). The configuration of the network may then vary according to the nature of the communication. For administrative matters it may appear thus:

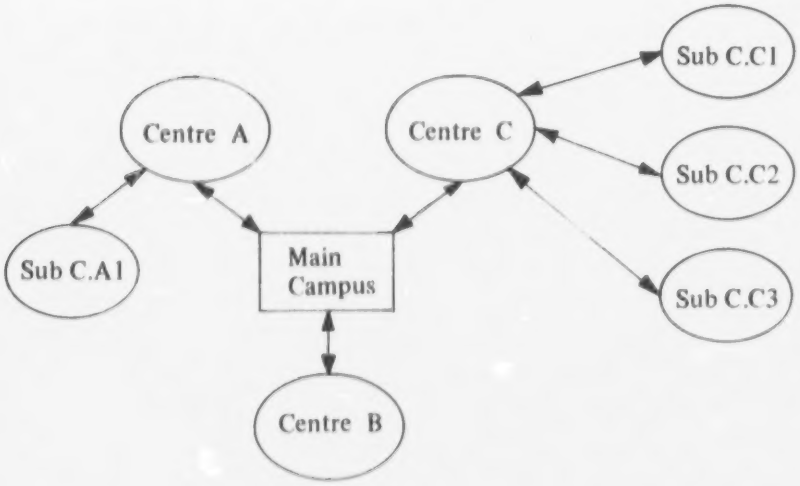


Diagram 2.3

For academic purposes, such as utilizing telecommunications for teaching/tutoring, or for teleconferencing, such as staff discussions of institute issues, complete point to multi-point networking may be possible (Diagram 2.4).

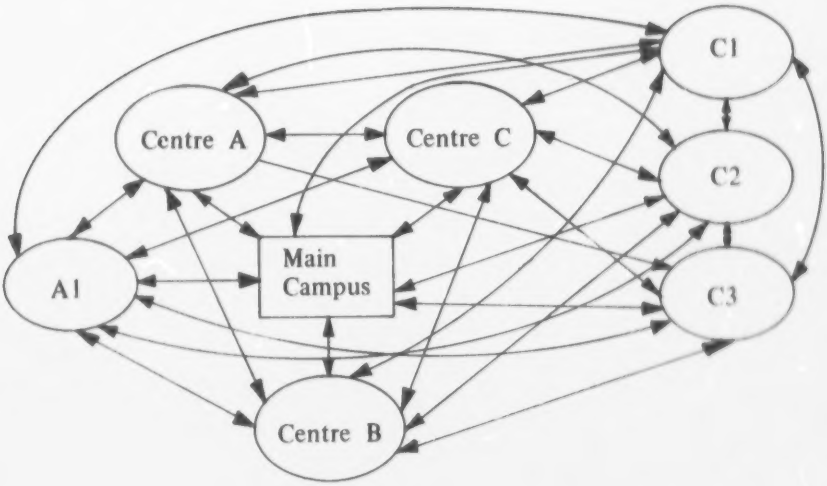


Diagram 2.4

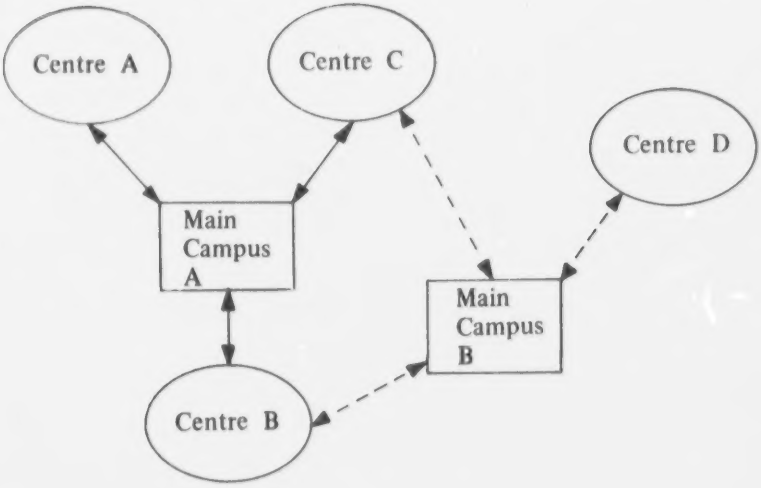


Diagram 2.5

A further complication will occur in cases where the study centres serve more than one parent institution. However, unless there is collaboration between the institutions, for all intents and purposes, the two or more systems may co-exist and yet have no relationship to one another in practical terms (Diagram 2.5).

In case of rationalization and sharing of teaching (at a distance and involving centres' handling of study materials and administering tutorials/classes), then the point-to-multipoint networking may be advantageous or necessary (Diagram 2.6).

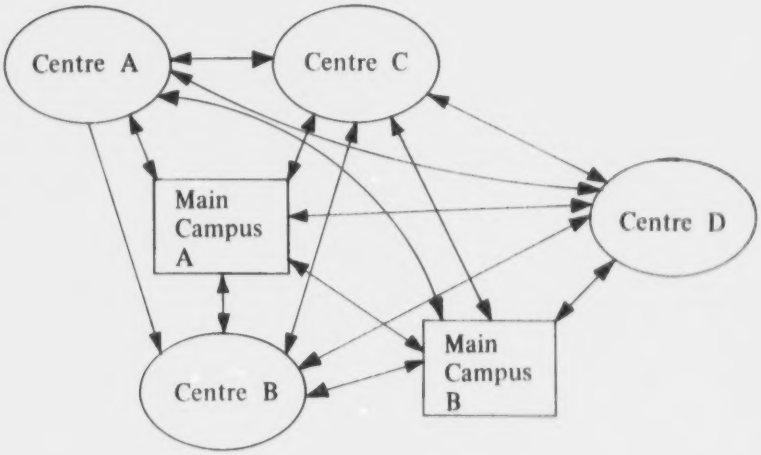


Diagram 2.6

Such a study centre system configuration is becoming more likely for the near future in Australia following the beginning of the rationalization of distance education provision in 1989.

Examples of study centre types

Many distance teaching institutions consider that a comprehensive system of decentralized student support is a vital component of their teaching strategies. The Open University, UK, has for instance a network of 260 regional study centres staffed with tutors, counsellors administrators and containing a wide variety of educational facilities (Sewart, 1981). The OU-UK model has influenced many institutions, but few have adopted the model without modifications.

Australia

In Australia distance teaching institutions show a wide divergence in their commitment to study centres. There is no shared philosophy about student support and each institution has gone its own way. In New South Wales and South Australia, institutions emphasize direct interaction between teachers and students and scarcely use study centres. In Tasmania and the Northern Territory, study centres act as brokers for all distance teaching institutions in which local residents might be enrolled. These centres act as information and access centres as well as offering locations for some tutorial support, particularly for residential school needs.

Toowoomba, Queensland

Tutorial using Aussat satellite for one-way video teleconferencing and two-way audio contact.

In Western Australia, 70 per cent of the students live in the capital city and have access to one or more tertiary institutions. The remainder of the population is so widely spread and isolated as to make a study centre network extremely expensive and not a viable proposition. Telecommunications is seen as the logical and most efficient means of providing student support, in conjunction with a system of access centres to provide advice and counselling for those interested in tertiary education.

In Queensland a regional network of some of study centres exists, often shared by a number of institutions. Such a network has been in operation since 1949. Recently, the Queensland government has encouraged its educational institutions to set up regional campuses to deliver face-to-face tuition. In 1989 it provided a $1 million grant to set up a network of 40 regional Open Learning Centres to act as educational brokers and support for enrolled students.

Victorian institutions vary in their use of study centres. Deakin University uses them for reference centres while the TAFE network uses theirs for academic as well as administrative activities. The TAFE centres have a high degree of autonomy in that they deliver and monitor distance learning courses locally, with only loose liaison and co-ordination between them.

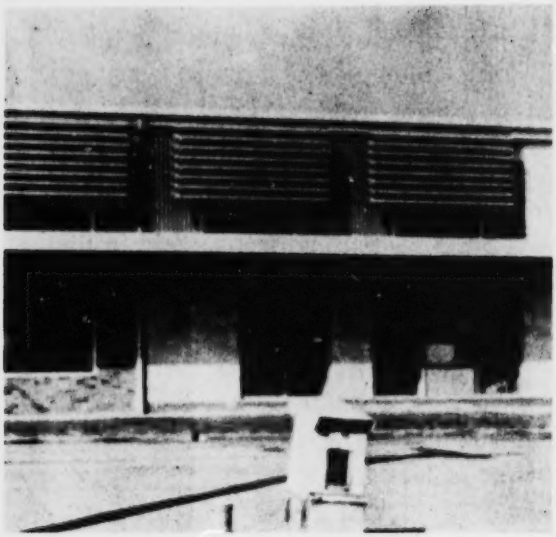
Academic collaboration between distance teaching institutions has also meant that institutions act as study centres for one another. Australian study centres serve a number of institutional functions:

- establishing a focus and presence for higher education in rural or isolated communities;
- providing facilities and a location for enrolled students to pursue educational activities, from fact-to-face tuition by visiting lecturers to solo research and study;

- setting up a mini-campus where face-to-face tuition is occasionally supplemented with distance learning;
- acting as an educational broker for many distance education institutions;
- providing a liaison for graduates and professionals who wish to maintain a continuing involvement in higher education;
- encouraging the collegiality which is often missing for distance learning students, by providing a welcoming venue where they can meet and socialize with others doing similar studies;
- in the satellite campuses and the more autonomous study centres, some of the institutions' centralized functions can occur. For example: recruitment of local tutors, staff development activities, production and distribution of some study materials, classes in study skills, student surveys, marking of assignments and examinations, feedback to students, classes and tutorials, autonomy in financial management, integration with face-to-face tuition, entrepreneurial activities, etc.

In general Australian institutions set up study centres in three ways:

- build a facility designed for the exclusive purpose of being a study centre;
- rent of lease commercial or other premises, and redesign them for the purpose;
- use space in an existing facility that already has one or more educational, commercial or community purposes.



Nambour, Queensland

The staff and facilities of this Study Centre, located on the top floor, are shared by external students of three institutions.

The ground floor (originally an occasional child care centre) is now a satellite campus for another tertiary institution. Students from all four institutions share the library on second floor.

A study centre may be for the sole use of students of one institution, it may be shared with one or more institutions (who contribute to the costs), or it may be a government (or other) funded access centre that acts as a broker for all institutions. In Australia there are very few purpose-built study centres. Many are rented and redesigned premises, but the majority are shared, multipurpose facilities, the study centre being a secondary user of a primary educational facility.

Canada

Similar to Australia, distance teaching institutions in Canada have adopted a wide variety of responses to providing external students with local support through study centres.

Great Britain

The British Open University has set up some 260 regional study centres, using local colleges, schools or other educational

establishments (Kirk, 1979). These centres are open weekday evenings and sometimes on weekends, providing a local contact place for enrolled students and their tutors/counsellors. However, students often use mail or telephone to contact their tutor, rather than attending the local study centre. This is particularly so in post-foundation studies. Open University students do not have direct and on-going contact with course writers on the central campus. The regional study centre, the local tutor/counsellor and other students thereby become a student's only possibility for contact and support.

Africa

In Botswana study centres were set up to provide quiet study facilities that most students were unable to find at home, and to provide local tuition to ensure that students who were having difficulty could be assisted before they dropped out of the course (Inquai, 1983). Existing secondary classrooms are used in the evenings and staffed by part-time tutors, markers and administrators who are often principals and secondary school staff.

In Nigeria the Open Studies Unit at the University of Lagos used existing educational facilities to set up its network of study centres (Olumide, 1977). In addition to tutoring, meeting and private study facilities, the study centre provide a location for laboratory, practical and residential school activities, as well as a distribution point for course materials and student assignments. The distribution activity is largely due to the need for security and an irregular postal service.

Zambia has tried to meet its need for secondary school teachers through distance education methods, providing student support through supervised study groups and evening radio broadcasts (Perraton, 1983). Supervised study groups meet during the day, usually at a primary school, though occasionally at a secondary school, where they are supervised and assisted (though not "taught").

This sort of study centre is often run more as part of the school than as an additional activity. Since these centres operate in school buildings out of hours, the only direct costs are those of supervision.

South West Africa Peoples' Organization has set up study centres for Namibian refugees in Angola and Zambia (Namibian Extension Unit, 1985). These centres are usually situated in Health and Education Centres and staffed by study group leaders who are students a few courses ahead. These in turn are supervised by part-time tutors and field supervisors. Study materials are distributed from the study centres, local tutors conduct lessons, and mark assignments and tests. Financial support comes from a number of governments and international bodies including the United Nations.

Japan

In Tokyo the University of the Air plans purpose-built study centres in each prefecture to provide facilities for teaching, examinations, viewing TV programmes, library research and counselling (University of the Air Foundation, 1982). Printed coursework is supported by study centre tuition and broadcast lessons on radio and TV. Such centres offer tuition in the afternoons, evenings and on weekends. Centres are staffed by a Director, and part- and full-time teaching and administrative staff. These study centres are financed by government grants and subsidies, with some additional revenue from student tuition fees.

University of the South Pacific

The U.S.P. belongs to and serves 11 independent countries: Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Niue, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, and Western Samoa. The University has a centre in each of those countries with the exception of Tokelau. A Tokelau Officer caring for university business with that country works out of the Western Samoa Centre.

Each of the regional centres represents the university in its country, provides administrative and academic services for the external students, organizes and runs non-credit, continuing education courses and activities for its own country, and is staffed and equipped as a study centre with library, audio-visual, study, and laboratory and workshop facilities.

Each centre has academic and support staff who are full members of the university staff, and recruits local tutors and markers acceptable to the respective teaching departments on campus. Some centres also employ local co-ordinators when there are economically viable nucleii of students remote from the centre.

All centres and the external studies section of the main university campus in Fiji, are linked point to multipoint for voice and electronic mail communications via Intelsat. This "USPNet" supports teletutorials, daily administrative traffic, and tele-conferences for continuing education activities.

Examples of study centres

Table 1 lists the salient characteristics of study centres under physical, functional, and administrative categories. It indicates for a number of institutions of higher education (those known in some detail to the authors) which of those characteristics are exhibited by their study centres. It should be noted that not all of those ticked may be present in any of the study centres forming part of an institution's student support system, but that to the authors' best knowledge all of those ticked exist within that system. The variation between centres within one system is a function of the degree of decentralization and of permitted local initiative.

Table 1. Examples of the physical, functional, and administrative characters of some study centres

	U.S.P.	U.C.S.Q.	N.I.C.	O.U.S.L.	G.N.O.U	U.P.N.G.	U.W.I.
1. Physical nature							
a) Facilities							
Purpose-designed	●	●	●				●
Single institute user	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Administrative office(s)	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Class/tutorial room(s)	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Private study room(s)	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Library	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Computers	●	●	●				●
A/V equipment	●	●	●	●	●		●
Laboratory(s) workshop(s)	●	●	●		●		
Teletutorial facilities	●	●					●
Photocopying	●	●	●				●
Facsimile		●	●				
Electronic-mail		●					
b) Access							
Car-parking	●	●	●			●	●
Personal security measures							
Open 24 hours		●					
Open everyday		●					
Weekdays only	●		●			●	●
Week days and evenings	●		●			●	
Staffed when open	●		●	●	●	●	●
Staffed daytime only		some					●
2. Functions							
a) Administrative							
Orientation sessions	●	●					

Table 1. Examples of the physical, functional, and administrative characters of some study centres (cont'd)

	U.S.P.	U.C.S.Q.	N.I.C.	O.U.S.L.	I.G.N.O.U.	U.P.N.G.	U.W.I.
Counselling	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Enrolment	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Student queries	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Materials distribution	●		●	●	●	●	
Promotion/publicity	●	●				●	●
Local liaison	●	●				●	●
b) Academic							
Live tutoring	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Teletutoring	●	●					●
Library advice	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Private study	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Peer tutorials	●	●					
Study skills courses/counselling	●	●					
Examinations	●	●				●	●
c) Social							
Student associations	●	●					
Alumni	●						
Functions/ceremonies	●	●					●
Facilities for social gatherings	●	●					
Local activities	●	●				●	●
Non-institutional use	●	●					
3. Administration							
a) Staffing							
Academic staff	●		●	●	●	●	●
Administrative staff	●		●	●	●	●	●
Librarian	●		●	●	●	●	●
Technical maintenance	●		●	?	?		?

Table 1. Examples of the physical, functional, and administrative characters of some study centres (cont'd)

	U.S.P.	U.C.S.Q.	N.I.C.	O.U.S.L.	I.G.N.O.U.	U.P.N.G.	U.W.I.
Other maintenance staff	●		●	●	●	●	●
Local tutors (part-time)	●		●	?	●	●	●
Visiting institutional tutors	●			●			
Centre staff full-time	●		●	●	●	●	●
Sub-centre(s) staff	●						
Local co-ordinators	●	●					
b) Management							
Total central control			●	●	●	●	●
Some centre independence	●					?	?
Central funding only		●	●	●	●	●	●
Some local funding	●						
Some centre budgeting control	●	●					

U.S.P. : University of the South Pacific
U.C.S.Q. : University College of Southern Queensland
N.I.C. : North Island College
O.U.S.L. : Open University of Sri Lanka
I.G.N.O.U. : Indira Gandhi National Open University
U.P.N.G. : University of Papua New Guinea
U.W.I. : University of the West Indies

The authors would appreciate information from other institutions so that the table could be extended. They would also be glad to have errors in the table pointed out to them and apologise in advance for any they have made.

Chapter Three

WHY MIGHT AN INSTITUTION WANT STUDY CENTRES ?

The philosophy of distance education

There are four main groupings of beliefs about on-campus traditional higher education system vis-a-vis distance education:

- that "proper" higher education is a social and socializing process and that face-to-face teaching is essential;
- that even if the social and socializing aspects are ignored, some of the essential cognitive processes cannot be provided for except in face-to-face teaching/learning situations;
- that some students may be able to succeed with completely remote, individual higher education study, but that many need face-to-face teaching at least for part of the time;
- that all students in most courses can be provided with the means of completely satisfactory, individual, distance learning, but that many students will benefit from enrichments to the learning strategies developed for self-instruction, and that institutions should try to provide these enrichments.

Distance Education systems designed to satisfy each of these beliefs may or may not establish study centres and the work of centres that are established varies with those beliefs also. The University of New England, Australia, has its distance learners attend residential schools on the main campus and has only one "centre" in Sydney (though it has an annual enrolment of external students in excess of 8,500). The Open University of the Netherlands, like that of the United Kingdom, provides for teaching of various sorts at its study centres. Most Australian institutions do not.

Demographic characteristics of the students

Study centres are of little use if they cannot be visited using affordable time and money on travel whenever required by students. Their viability depends therefore on the geographical distribution of the students. There should be sufficient numbers within a thirty (30) minutes journey to the centre. This seems to mark the "watershed" for most centres. (For the Indira Gandhi Open University, this local concentration should number about 500 to justify setting up a study centre (Anjanappa, 1989). If most students are widely scattered, study centres will be relatively uneconomic and unjustifiable (Smith and Small, 1982).

The age and maturity of students needs to be considered also. Younger students straight from high school and those who may be older but lacking in higher education experience, will require local and easily accessible support more than older, more mature students who have some post-secondary study experience. Much depends on the nature of the cognitive and study skills demands made by the tertiary institution and how they compare with the students' previous experience. These demands will affect the degree and amount of local support the students will need.

Sociological factors

Some institutions have a strong belief in the importance of social interaction and the socializing of students. They are likely to maintain their providing of these features in their distance teaching and may well use study centres to assist in doing so. Centres can encourage and support alumni organizations for example, and can promote the development of peer groups for mutual student support in common courses. Centres can be foci for formal and informal, task-specific and casual meetings of students.

There are socio-political advantages also to institutions in having study centres. Centres are the local presence of the institution, reminding people of it and orienting people's thinking towards it. In days of higher education expansion this can help to ensure local opportunities and possibilities for extending its teaching and other services. When there is competition for funding and for students, study centres can play an important role in persuading local students to enroll with their parent institution.

Regional centres of the University of the South Pacific provide continuing education opportunities for local people. Here an art workshop is in progress in the Cook Islands Centre.

More altruistically, an institution may establish study centres to supply space and resources which some students may not be able to afford for themselves: quiet study rooms, libraries, video and other A.V. equipment, computers, laboratories and workshops, and electronic/satellite connections with the main campus.

Should it wish to, an institution can also utilize study centres to demonstrate its responsiveness to local needs and desires. Some of the university of the South Pacific's centres for example, are architecturally designed to reflect local styles, as in Port Vila, Vanuatu, and administered in ways cognisant of local culture. In their continuing education (non-award course) work, U.S.P. centres have the freedom to respond to local interests. The strangeness and anonymity of faraway campuses can be usefully mitigated in such ways.

Exploitation of educational technology for teaching and learning

The argument for the establishment of study centres because of their role in allowing the institution to take advantage of useful educational technology, is most clearly expressed in Chang et al, 1983.

> "In our opinion, an institution of distance needs a computer system suited, from the outset, for both formative evaluation and computer assisted instruction ... Terminals of the system will have to be installed at the regional centres of the educational organization." (Chang, 1983, pp. 108-109).

Institutions may want those computers used for conferencing and for the transmission of electronic mail, or as complements to audio or audio-visual teleconferences. Experience shows that the opportunity to make use of facsimile communications lead to a rapid

increase in fax traffic by students (at Darling Downs Institute of Advanced Education, items sent to the campus via fax increased from a total of 6,000 in 1988 to 8,000 in 1989).

Core study materials and/or enrichments may include audio and video-cassettes, specimens for microscopic examination, film-strips, and reference books and articles which students may wish to photocopy. Access to the necessary machinery very likely must be provided at study centres.

Administration convenience

Institutions can decentralize large parts of critical functions to study centres. Centres can provide prospective students with counselling, selection testing, and enrolment including fee receipt. Bulk mailing of study materials to centres can reduce cost and make supply to students more efficient than when all mailing is sent directly to individual students from the campus. In some situations, assignments and written queries from students also benefit from bulk mailing to and from the campus via the centres. This is so at the University of the South Pacific where the university uses a system of special bags on weekly air flight between the regional centres and the Suva campus. Many queries can be answered at study centres. The organizing of local tutorials and visits of campus staff is most easily done through and by centres. Centres can do all that is necessary to conduct examinations for local students.

Chapter Four

WHY MIGHT STUDENTS WANT STUDY CENTRES ?

Minimizing distance and reducing isolation

The sense of remoteness from the institutions, of isolation and the lack of frequent live contact with staff and fellow students, is often given as a reason why numbers of distance learning students fail to complete courses and awards. However, it is worth noting that few students surveyed in many distance education systems throughout the world have given this sense of isolation as a factor in actual or possible non-completion. But students who do look for live social contact during their studies can fulfill their needs at study centres. At a centre, a student can meet with institute staff even if only as administrators. Through the centre other students who have done a particular course previously or who are in the same course at the time, may be contacted either there or through the mediation of centre staff. One important benefit of contact with students doing the same course is that, just as happens on-campus, the individual gets a sense of his or her standing within the group in terms of progress and understanding. Some study centres organize tutoring for students by centre staff or other local persons. Such tutoring also serves to give students a measure of their learning progress.

Communication with teachers of the institution can be arranged through visits of teachers to centres where classes may be

held, or through telephone and other media. This may be on a one-to-one basis or in group sessions such as telephone tutorials.

There is evidence to suggest that a minority of students do have a need for interactive contact with other students and with staff. At the University of the South Pacific for example, some students are regular attenders of voluntary teletutorials though the majority of students rarely attend (Williams, 1986).

Access to learning facilities

Great store is often placed by institutions of higher education which teach at a distance on providing lists of reference books, and on listing additional and voluntary reading which would enhance and expand understanding of the basic study materials sent to students. Similarly, funds are expended in providing as much of this reference material as can be afforded in study centre libraries. Some distance students do make use of these collections (particularly if they contain copies of the required textbooks for their courses). Generally speaking, however distance learners have little or no time to undertake such additional reading and will not do so unless there is a requirement to do so written into the course specification and such reading is examinable.

The same is true of other "enrichment" resources such as video tapes. Students will not go in large numbers to study centres to access them unless they are critical elements of their courses. (And if they really are critical elements, students who find difficulty in getting to centres are seriously disadvantaged. For them, some other ways of providing the essential materials must be found, such as the copying of audio or video tapes for individual students).

Increasing numbers of courses in the more technically sophisticated societies include computing in a variety of ways to manage

aspects of distance education systems and to assist in the actual learning process. Students are being forced to come to terms with this situation and may have to rely on computers provided at study centres if they cannot afford to buy the equipment themselves. Even if they do have a suitable machine but no modem, students will need access to terminals at a study centre if they are required to retrieve data or access software in the campus mainframe (Chang et al, 1983).

Brisbane, Queensland

Computer laboratory at a regional study centre with 24 hour access by combination lock. The computers have dual disc drives and 20mb hard disc storage. Students access these facilities by booking in advance.

Antiqua Study Centre, University of the West Indies.

A group of nurses attending a teletutorial enhanced by freeze-frame video pictures transmitted via satellite from the Mona campus of the University in Jamaica.

Another facilities which attracts some students to a study centre is the communication provided for contacting campus staff. This may be in face-to-face sessions when lecturers visit centres periodically, or through teleconferencing and teletutoring sessions using a variety of media. If the appropriate calibre persons can be found, tutorials run by local people at a study centre are popular with students.

Some distance learners have living conditions which made private study extremely difficult. Quiet and comfortable study space at a centre can answer this need. It is clear that institutions need to gather considerable information about a range of circumstances of their distance students.

Improving communications and reducing their costs

Through utilizing communication facilities available at study centres, students enjoy surer and more effective contact with on-campus staff answering administrative and academic queries directly and promptly.

The staff of a study centre should know to whom on campus a student needs to speak. They can choose the appropriate communication medium for the individual case – courier mail, electronic mail, telephone, radio, facsimile. For needy students such services can reduce costs in a most welcome way and contribute to equity of opportunity among students.

Chapter Five

HOW MIGHT STUDY CENTRES BE SET UP?

Institutional initiatives

Distance teaching institutions having a strong philosophical commitment to the provision of regional support for students usually develop either a study centre network or a liaison officer network, or a combination of both. For some institutions where study materials are not seen as a sufficiently effective means of delivery, study centres may be needed for face-to-face tuition as part of the primary delivery of distance learning. For other institutions, study centres allow decentralization of a number of functions: satellite campuses, dispatch of print materials, monitoring the flow of assessment exercises, organizing examinations, holding residential schools, etc. This may alleviate the need for campus staff to travel widely and may encourage students to enroll with the institution because of the perceived benefits in progressing through a course of study without having to leave the local community.

Depending on the proposed functions of a study centre and the degree of autonomy allocated to the management, institutions may go about setting up centres in a number of ways. The institution may choose to set up an entirely new network of centres or it may choose to piggyback onto an existing system (or a combination of both in order to suit its needs). This decision needs to be made by those who best understand the delivery of the distance learning package.

Once the type of system and the management structure have been agreed upon, it remains to choose the site locations. Where should each new centre be located? Which cite/town? A needs analysis should be conducted to ascertain the student population base in various locations. Data should be collected in order to discover the current level of educational provision in each of the communities being considered for a study centre. Major contributors to the local community should be surveyed and support and advice enlisted.

Where in the city should the centre be located? This decision depends on whether the parent institution plans to build or buy a single purpose facility, rent commercial premises or seeks to share with another existing educational provider in the community. The availability, location and cost of various premises needs to match the institution's planned functions and budget. Issues such as central location, availability of public transport and parking, after-hours accessibility, and identification in the minds of the potential users as a suitable location for educational pursuits, all need to be considered.

If the study centre is to be purpose-built, the parent institution's normal building procedures will apply, including preliminary plans and financial arrangements, contractual obligations and construction. Several of the regional centres of the University of the South Pacific, such as that on Funafuti, Tuvalu, are examples.

If the centre is planned to occupy existing commercial premises, a suitable site needs to be located and a rental or leasing agreement formulated. Interior alterations to ensure efficient use as a study centre may need to be made. One of the more difficult problems is often that of after-hours access and security. The University College of Southern Queensland has recently converted a floor of a commercial building into its Brisbane centre.

Where shared facilities are planned, a preliminary investigation should have identified a number of current educational locations. The benefits and drawbacks of each site should be evaluated and the best site chosen. Negotiations with the shared users can be critical in the long term success of a shared study centre. The Hervey Bay centre of the University College of Southern Queensland has been mentioned as an example of this sort of arrangement.

Student initiatives

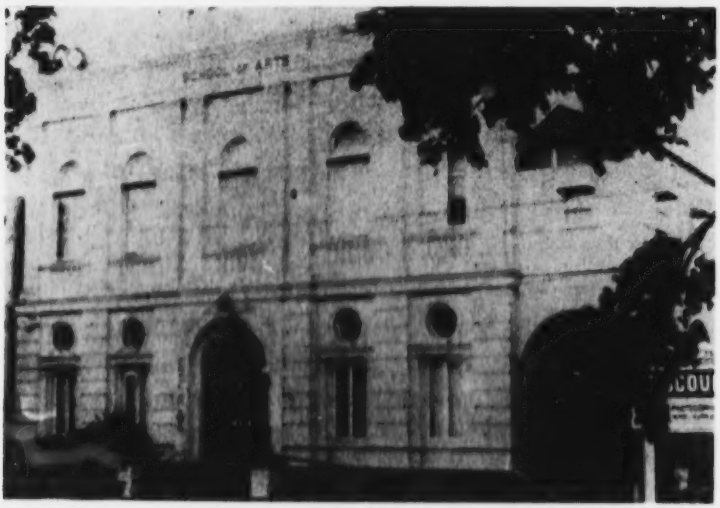
Students may band together to request support from the parent institution in the form of study centre facilities. They may be aware of the fact that other institutions provide such services for their students, and wish to have such support for themselves. They may have special needs (e.g. access to computing equipment) that is not otherwise available to them privately. Groups of students (e.g. employees from the same bank or business) may enroll in the same course at the same time, and see the obvious benefits in working together after-hours in a study centre environment.

For whatever reason students may singly or in groups petition the parent institution for study centre facilities in their local region. If the institution is unable or unwilling to set up a study centre, students may find local facilities for themselves and set up an ad hoc centre without the involvement of the parent institution.

Local community initiatives

In some communities where access to higher education is only available by distance learning, community and parent groups spring up in an effort to stimulate an interest in and support for higher education. Alumni, businessmen and some professionals also lend support to such "higher education associations". These groups can

bring together currently enrolled students, approach institutions for support, lobby governmental bodies and generally provide a focus for higher education in the community. Such groups can assist greatly in setting up a centre by providing local advice and assistance in a number of ways. Examples of such assistance are: fund raising, finding suitable premises, organizing local social clubs to provide furniture, setting up scholarships for local students, etc. There is strong government and local community support for the University of the South Pacific's study centre on Rarotonga, Cook Islands. The centre is viewed by this small country as its higher education centre.



Maryborough, Queensland

This building is owned by the local city council, and leased to the three institutions who use the top floor for a cooperative study centre. Facilities include a library, teleconference/tutorial rooms, a small kitchen and a computer laboratory with 24 hour access.

Shared facilities with other providers

Premises may be shared with other providers to the benefit of all users. If there is another major provider at the location of the planned study centre, facilities may be given freely in exchange for a reciprocal arrangement at the first provider's campus. If there is an underutilized educational facility in the proposed location, they may be happy to provide such facilities in order to increase usage and provide a service to local residents. In some situations a type of joint rental may be feasible where all the parent institutions pay a share of the leasing costs and operational expenses; some staff may be shared (e.g. centre manager) while other staff may work for only a single institution (e.g. tutor in a specialist subject). Equipment and furniture, etc. may be purchased on a shared cost basis, or each institution may provide the special equipment and furniture that are required by its own students. Such sharing arrangements can be negotiated between the parent institutions, or may be initiated by a study centre manager who might oversee arrangements between institutions only with regard to the needs of that single study centre. Sharing institutions may choose to keep certain equipment or rooms for the sole use of their students, or they may choose to participate in a booking system of first-come, first-served. The arrangements of these sorts made by the Indira Gandhi National Open University are well worth studying and very useful detail is given in Anjanappa, 1989.

Chapter Six

WHAT ROOMS, EQUIPMENT, MATERIALS MIGHT BE NEEDED IN A STUDY CENTRE ?

Rooms

Room requirements are of course related directly to functions and numbers of staff, students and others who use the centre. We can generalize however to give some guidance to those setting up a new centre:

- teaching rooms set up for lecturers, seminars and tutorials, including teleconferences and other audio-visual facilities;
- private study rooms or carrels;
- library;
- office space for staff, including private counselling space or private offices as needed;
- computer laboratory with 24-hour access;
- larger space (or expandable space) for orientation and careers/course information meetings, examinations, workshops and visiting lectures;
- foyer, waiting area, display area, counter/shop front for dealing with incoming public, refreshment area, toilets, storage;

- storage space (which would need to be considerable and specially designed if study materials are to be warehoused or if climatic conditions might affect deterioration of equipment, paper and other supplies).

An example of a room layout for a study centre servicing about 200 external students is included in this section .

Comox Centre, North Island College.

Sophisticated furnishings and equipment for the production and storage of study materials for supporting students' study.

Storage space (which would need to be considerable and specially designed if study materials are to be warehoused or if climatic conditions might affect deterioration of equipment, paper and other supplies).

Equipment

Once again, choice of equipment will be determined by function, but the following will provide a useful guide:

- Audio-visual equipment for teaching rooms:
  a) video cassette recorder and playback facilities;
  b) television and antenna;
  c) audio cassette recording, duplicating and playback equipment;
  d) overhead projector and screen;
  e) blackboard, whiteboard, noticeboard;
  f) teleconference system with microphones and speakers;
  g) satellite and radio facilities.
- Office and communications equipment:
  a) telephones and telephone lines;
  b) telephone answering machine;
  c) facsimile;
  d) photocopier;
  e) typewriters.
- Computing equipment:
  a) computers, keyboards and screens;
  b) software for electronic mail, wordprocessing, spreadsheets, data bases and any specialist needs;
  c) hardware and software manuals;
  d) printers and modems;

e) disc copiers and storage;

f) supplies such as paper, ribbons, backup discs;

g) computer furniture and chairs, wiring and lighting;

h) security/alarm system, dust and heat protection.

– Furniture and library equipment:

a) desks, chairs, lectern;

b) shelving, tables, seating, filing cabinets and card files;

c) amenities for refreshments (e.g. tea/coffee making facilities, chairs for relaxation);

d) enquiry counter, display boards/racks/shelves, storage;

e) library books, reference collection and filing/checkout/return system.

General requirements

A study centre, whether shared or single-purpose, should possess a number of other attributes besides the rooms and equipment listed above.

– The location should be readily accessible to students and in a central area, and the location should be identifiable as related to educational purposes. If the location is too remote, students will find it difficult to make the trip. If the location is unsavoury, students will be unwilling or insecure in visiting the centre.

- Access hours and staffing must coincide with students needs. It is particularly important that computer laboratories have long hours of access, often 24-hours and in areas secure from the rest of the centre.
- Parking and public transport should be easily available at the times that students will be using the centre and be available at a low cost.
- Lighting both inside and outside should be adequate for security and study. Special lighting for individual reading and computing needs should be provided.
- Provision of telephone, electrical and water/drainage lines should be sufficient for needs. Air-conditioning and/or heating may also be necessary both for comfort of users and for protection of the equipment.
- Security, cleaning and emergency equipment (first aid, fire extinguishers, etc.) should be provided for. Local building codes and regulations may add some particular requirements.
- Finally the centre should be set up so that students feel welcome and safe, and so that they will gain from coming to the centre. It should provide them with facilities, equipment, staff assistance and social interaction that they cannot get otherwise. The centre should provide a similar face to both the local community and to supporting institutions. It should be both efficient and cost-effective and thought may be given to the centre becoming self-funding, perhaps on a user-pays basis.

Dekkers, Kelly, and Sharma (1988) reflect on their examination of Australian study centres:

"The poorer a centre is resourced the lower will be its use by students and institutional staff".

Chapter Seven

WHAT STAFF MIGHT BE REQUIRED IN A STUDY CENTRE?

Staffing to fulfill functions

Administrator/manager/liaison officer.

This person is responsible for the day-to-day functioning of the centre and, as in the case of the University of the South Pacific's centres, may also play a significant role in determining centre policy. The manager is the liaison person for the student users, the parent institutions and the local community. The manager is responsible for the fabric of the centre and for the scheduling of its facilities. In addition the manager may take on a number of other roles and responsibilities, such as counselling, tutoring, library management, etc. A typical duty statement for such a position is attached to this section. This person may work full or part-time, and may be able to carry out some of the study centre responsibilities from home. In the more autonomous centres, the manager may also have financial and fund-raising responsibilities. You will have read earlier that in some distance education systems, the chief administrator of a centre is an academic member of staff.

Tutor/lecturer.

A number of institutions employ regional teachers to provide distance learning students with academic support and assistance.

Such tutors are usually specialists in a particular academic discipline and provide part-time classes for local students. These teachers are usually considered to be part-time staff of the parent institution and are employed on the same basis as campus staff. In some cases, however, teachers may be employed directly by the centre manager to perform a specific function for that centre.

Librarian.

Where distance learning programmes have a heavy emphasis on individual library research and reading, institutions employ a full-time or part-time librarian to assist students. The librarian is also responsible for maintaining the collection, overseeing loans, and preparing reports for the parent institution on usage and needs.

Various other staff may be employed for specific functions or to assist the above staff in a larger centre. Specialist counsellors may provide assistance in study skills, health matters, financial matters, administrative and enrolment areas, careers advice, etc. Administrative assistants can provide secretarial and bookkeeping skills to the manager and other staff. Technical specialists may assist in maintaining and repairing equipment and facilities. Cleaners and security guards may also be employed.

Possible management structures

Study centres may be strongly managed from the parent institution with frequent communication and stringent controls imposed as in the case of the Indira Gandhi National Open University. Or centres may be nearly autonomous acting in an entrepreneurial manner to attract courses from different institutions, more or less as an educational broker for their local area.

In the case of close institutional control of regional centres, a centre may have little financial involvement in its operation. All

accounts, income and salaries are managed centrally. Scheduling of the facilities may have some degree of local control, but there is likely to be a centralized system into which local request must fit. Staff recruitment, selection and training is carried out by the parent institution, often using local facilities. Such centralized control requires that the parent institution sets up a section on the home campus with sufficient staff and budget to maintain and support the network of study centres.

Even a centre with little autonomy will benefit from an advisory group made up, for example, of students (past and present), members of the local community with an interest or influence in educational matters, a campus representative and the study centre manager. Such a group can assist the smooth and effective functioning of the centre in many ways.

For centres with considerable autonomy and of reasonable size, the management of the centre will essentially follow the lines of a small business. The manager may be employed by the parent institution but be responsible to a local board for effective and efficient use of the centre. The centre may have partial or complete control of its financial activities; it may in fact be a profit-making organization, ploughing its profit back into expanding the centre or assisting the community. For such a centre, the relationship with parent institutions may be that of an educational broker, where it contracts to provide certain agreed-upon services to local students by charging both the institution and the user-student a fee-for-service. In this type of centre, the parent institution will have little or no managerial control, and a campus contact person may be sufficient to maintain the relationship with the centre. In contrast with the centrally controlled centres, however, the autonomous centre may need a local board or council to advise it in its business ventures. This board may exercise strong control over the manager and the centre's activities, and may in fact be held responsible for its success.

Recruitment and training

Staff can be recruited from the local community or moved from the parent institution. Where recruited locally, it is usual to advertise the position in the local media. Interviews can be conducted by bringing all candidates to the parent institution, by setting up a local panel, by sending campus interviewers to the regional centre, by using teleconferencing facilities or a combination of several of these methods. If the appointee is to be transferred from the parent institution, normal campus recruitment and appointment procedures will undoubtedly apply.

Once the successful applicant is chosen, a variety of training methods will be required, depending considerably on the position and the autonomy of the centre. In general, however, all staff require orientation and new job training immediately, and in the longer term, continuous upgrading of existing skills and learning of new skills and information. This can be done by a variety of methods, similar to those used for recruitment: the new staff member can be sent to the parent campus for intensive training, local staff and experts may conduct the training, campus staff may visit the centre to train the new appointee, a variety of telecommunications and audio-visual methods may be used, or some combination of the above methods. For on-going training, visits both ways, newsletters, telecommunications, local and visiting experts, coursework, etc. may prove effective. In both recruitment and training, it is important that this responsibility be delegated and carried our by a specific person or section, and that it be evaluated and upgraded as needed.

Terms and hours of service

Staff may be employed as regular (though off-campus) members of the parent institution with the same conditions of service, rights and privileges, awards, etc. as any other staff member. Or they may be employed by the local centre or community under similar conditions to those of any employee of a small business. They may be asked to work part-time or full-time, days, evenings or weekends, and be paid overtime rates or take time-off-in-lieu of extra time worked. Staff may be permanent or temporary employees under an award or a contract. Various federal, state and local industrial relations legislation will apply as will personnel policies and practices of the parent institution or the local community.

Chapter Eight

HOW MIGHT STUDY CENTRES BE LINKED WITH MAIN CAMPUSES ?

Possible management structures

The organizational structure and educational philosophy of the parent institution will greatly influence the management structure under which the study centre operates. We will look at the characteristics of two models which demonstrate the extremes of autonomy on the one hand and dependence on the other.

The main differences between the two models are the sizes of the section on the main campus to which the study centre reports, and the number of staff in the centre. In the autonomous model, more staff would be required at the centre and fewer on the main campus. The management structures of both models is shown in a general way in Diagram 8.1.

Depending on the size, function and autonomy of the regional centre, some of the management functions to do with resources, staffing and academic matters may be delegated by the Director to administrative staff of the centre in a variety of ways.

As in the case of the Indira Gandhi National Open University, centres may be grouped in a region with a number of smaller centres reporting to a larger, regional centre which in turn reports to the parent institution. The regional centre may then have major administrative responsibility for most of the functions of the satellite centre.

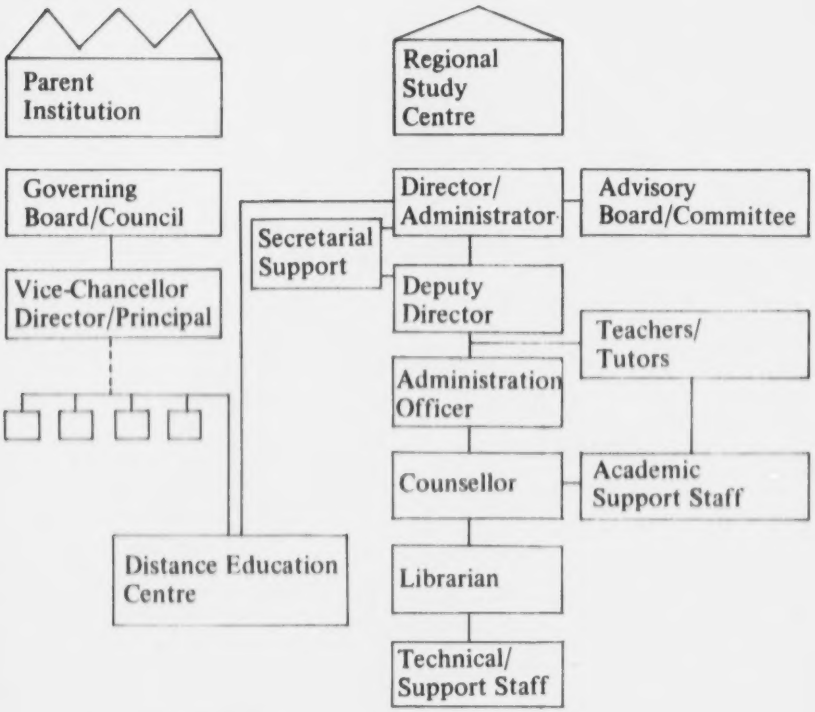


Diagram 8.1

Autonomous model:

Where a study centre operates in a fairly autonomous manner, virtually as a regional campus, the study centre will be guided by the policies and regulations of the main institution, but will have a fair amount of latitude in carrying out its day-to-day operations. The staff will often be required to take management decisions without reference to the central campus and will largely be responsible for their own financial and personnel management. A strong management section on the parent campus is probably not necessary, but representation on high level policy-making bodies is very valuable. Staff

in autonomous centres must selected for their ability to manage and plan; they must be strong in decision-making abilities and able to be entrepreneurial in order to advance the status of the centre within the community. In addition, they should be sufficiently politically astute as to represent the needs of the centre to the central administration on the parent campus.

Dependent model:

In the opposite extreme, where a study centre has little autonomy, the management control will reside largely with the parent institution and the staff of the centre will need to refer most decisions and financial management to their co-ordinators and superiors on the main campus. Communication between the centre and its parent campus then becomes vital to the efficient and effective functioning of the centre, and the actual management of communications can itself become a major task especially if the network of centres is complex (see Diagram 2.4).

Communications systems

Communications between the parent institution and the regional study centre is most vital when the centre is not able or allowed to operate in an autonomous manner. In the dependent study centre model, particularly, long distance communication becomes an essential tool of management. The methods of communication chosen will depend on the ability of each type to provide speed, low cost, reliability and ease of use. Specific staff at both the regional study centre and the parent institution must be given direct responsibility for maintaining whatever communication channels are used. Routines and protocols must be established and well understood by all users.

Electronic mail:

For study centres equipped with computers and telephone lines, electronic mail provides an inexpensive way to transmit non-interactive messages, which can be stored until the reader is ready, provides hard copy and has a number of alternative functions (such as management systems and bulletin boards) which can provide support and assistance.

Users must be computer literate and be able to do basic trouble shooting; technical support must be immediately available; and, above all, the staff at both ends must regularly access their mail and ensure that there is an efficient manual distribution system for the hard-copy messages when received.

Electronic mail has been used mainly for student enquiries or management issues between centre staff and various sections of the main campus. In some places where students have their own access to facilities either at home or at work, electronic mail can provide direct communication between lecturers or administrators on the central campus and the student. For institutions which have computerized many of their systems (e.g. student records and progression, library holdings and borrowings, financial records and requisitions, dispatch of study materials, assignment traffic, etc.), off-campus centres can effectively access many of these systems by electronic mail.

Telephone:

Perhaps the most common form of communication, the telephone, has the advantage of being ubiquitous, instantaneous and interactive. It has a few deficiencies as a communication medium which should be considered. The intended receiver is not always available at the time the caller wants to reach him/her; the two parties may in fact work at different hours or be sufficiently distant to be in

different time zones. There is no record ("hard copy") of the decisions made or the outcomes of the discussions. This might be desirable in some in stances. The cost of sending speech is usually considerably higher than the cost of sending computerized or electronic mail messages, and the conversation is usually one-to-one.

A number of innovations have helped to overcome some of these perceived deficiencies, such as the telephone answering machine and voice mail, toll-free or reverse charge telephone calls, and conference calls where large numbers can participate in discussions.

Facsimile:

Virtually a fast-speed photocopier which operates over telephone lines, this communications system is nearly instantaneous if not precisely interactive. It is useful for longer messages where print copy is important and particularly useful for such things as diagrams, forms, etc. where layout and spacing are an essential part of the message. It does not have the storage facilities of electronic mail and so depends upon the receiving machine being available and functioning properly. An advantage over electronic mail is that key-board and computing skills are not required; hand written messages can be sent by anyone who can dial a telephone.

Post/mail:

Usually the cheapest form of communication, but often the slowest, post is particularly useful for large volumes of print material, special items such as photographs, cassettes, computer discs, financial documents, etc. which cannot be sent by electronic means. Courier services have speeded up delivery services in many areas to such an extent that cost comparison or access may be the deciding factor rather than speed when choosing the preferred method of communication. Mail is not interactive, not usually dependent on the

receiver being there to accept the mail and needs no expensive technical equipment or well trained staff to keep it operational. Rail, truck, boat and personal courier mail are all included in this category.

Other methods of communication:

Personal visits and face-to-face meetings are particularly valuable where interactivity and discussion are needed. Such communication can be expensive in terms of staff time and associated travel costs but may be the most effective means of communication at certain times. Other means of communications such as radio, television, newspapers, satellite, audio and video tapes, dedicated computer lines, etc. may be used, or combinations of any of the above.

Institutions and regional centres must choose the communication systems that best serve their needs and provide an efficient and effective means of management.

Periodic conferences

Periodic conferences can serve a number of functions in the management of regional centres such as:

- initial training of new staff;
- specialist training in new equipment, systems, courses, etc.;
- retreat or renewal to remind continuing staff of major policy directions;
- provision of advice and solutions to problem areas.

Conferences can be held on the parent campus, in an area central to a number of centres or at a regional study centre itself. Cost and availability of staff, equipment and space will determine the most suitable location.

Besides the main purpose of training, development or problem-solving, such conferences help to alleviate the isolation of regional centre staff, enabling them to build personal relationships with staff of the parent institution and with staff of other centres. This collegiality and social interaction can be a powerful tool in the human resource management of a diverse and distant group of employees.

In addition to face-to-face meetings, conferences can be carried out by teleconferencing, computer conferencing, newsletters and regular reporting. All of these means may be usefully employed to maintain good communications and information exchange between the parent institution and its regional study centres.

Routines

Routines must be clearly defined and understood both at the regional study centres and on the campus of the parent institution, particularly with regard to staff responsibilities and lines of communication and authority.

A written procedures manual, such as the "Manual for Co-ordinators of Study Centres" put out be Indira Gandhi National Open University (Anjanappa, 1989) is an excellent tool for ensuring that staff are well informed about operational routines. Initial training of staff should focus very firmly on what procedures the new staff are expected to carry out, and periodic refresher courses should be used for renewal. Weekly or monthly newsletters, memoranda, audio and video cassettes, teleconferences and individual instruction can all serve to instil an understanding and adherence to prescribed routines.

Routines should cover both operations of the study centre itself and communications with the parent institution. Study centre routines should cover:

- basic understanding of the functions of parent institution and the role of study centre;
- academic matters:
  a) applications from students;
  b) enrolment and admission;
  c) academic regulation, grading;
  d) course progression;
  e) access to academic counselling;
  f) assignments;
  g) study skills and personal counselling;
  h) examinations;
  i) graduation;
  j) careers advice;
  k) evaluation.
- resources:
  a) financial management;
  b) payment of accounts, and fee collection;
  c) equipment and facilities, and control of stock;
  d) physical plant, building and upkeep;
  e) access;

- personnel:
  a) recruitment, selection and induction;
  b) training and development;
  c) payroll;
  d) conditions of service.
- other areas of service:
  a) public and community relations;
  b) functions and hospitality;
  c) advisory group functions;
  d) hospitality and functions;
  e) long-term planning and management of the centre.

Additionally, communication channels to the parent campus should be well defined. If the study centre is relatively reliant on a section of the parent campus for its day-to-day management, it should route all of its communications through this campus section. Management control will be difficult to maintain if various staff of the study centre are dealing independently with various administrative and teaching staff on the main campus.

Finally, routines should be written and available to all staff concerned. Staff should receive initial training and occasional updating. Routines should specify objectives and specific actions, with target dates or calendars for action and staff responsibilities.

POSTSCRIPT

Ideally, the initial character of study centres and of the whole of the student support system, should be the first stage in a well-conceived long-term plan which allows for changes in philosophy, courses provided, numbers of students, technology, and resource availability. Rarely is this ideal forward planning realized or indeed possible. Those who manage student support systems invariably adopt a pragmatic response to needs and opportunities presented from time to time; anticipated improvements to a system are introduced and time alone tells whether they do prove beneficial and worth persisting with.

Having said that, there is much experience and knowledge of student study habits to guide the managers of well-established distance education systems. Those embarking upon the provision of distance education may take heed of that experience also, but it appears sure that each system will have much individuality because its success depends on a number of factors or variables which we can list. It seems most likely to the authors that an important ingredient in determining the nature of individual study centres and of support systems, is a cultural one.

The danger of transporting educational theories and practices to radically different cultural and socio-economic situations, has been too well demonstrated for us to do more than remind readers of it here.

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Anjanappa K. (Ed), 1989. *Manual for Co-ordinators of Study Centres.* Indira Gandhi National Open University, New Delhi.

The manual expresses the philosophy underlying the establishment of the Indira Gandhi National Open University - the democratization of higher education. It is believed that the success of any programme depends not only on good study materials but also on face-to-face teaching which takes place at the study centres. Students have regular contacts with the university. The centres have laboratories, library, radio, television, audio and video facilities.

The functioning of the study centres is co-ordinated by the Regional Directors who have important liaison, administrative, and academic functions. The manual contains great and useful detail on provisions of local and university resources and on the functions of the regional and study centres and the duties of their staff.

Chang T.M., Crombag H.F., van der Drift K.D.J.M. and **Mooner J.M.** 1983. *Distance learning: on the design of an Open University.* Kluwer - Nighoff Publishing, Dordrecht, Netherlands.

The authors consider the form an open university for the Netherlands might take. It was their opinion that a computer system would be needed at the outset by any institution of distance education for formative evaluation and computer-aided-instruction. The terminals of the system should interact with the data bases held in the campus and regional centres would be needed to house the terminals. Even though, to maximize accessibility to learners, written instruction should be emphasized and face-to-face teaching minimized, the

writers believed that face-to-face instruction is necessary for the development of complex cognitive skills and that sessions such as at summer school are essential. Some of this necessary face-to-face teaching could take place at regional study centres that would be needed anyway for the computer system. The study centres should also then play a part in the important social aspects of higher education.

Chick John D. 1981. *Communication in distance education, proceedings of ASPESA forum, Dimensions of Distance.*

The University Centres' concept of the University of the South Pacific predated the establishment of the university's distance teaching. The centres carry the awareness of the university to ten of the 11 countries who fund and control it: they symbolize the University of the South Pacific's commitment to its region. The centres act as service agencies of the centrally directed distance education programmes, run their own continuing education programmes, and act as liaison point between the host government and communities and the university. Centre Directors and their staff have considerable room for initiative and the centres are most successful where they have been created and designed to meet pre-existing needs. The buildings, staffing and activities are described briefly.

Dekkers, J., Kelly, M.E. and **Sharma R.D.** 1988. *The Cost and Usage of Study Centres in Distance Education*. Department of Employment, Education and Training, Canberra.

The factors influencing the design of delivery systems in Australia are listed and an overview of the study centres of seven Australian institutions is given. Several studies of the factors affecting the effectiveness of study centres are reviewed. Northcott and Shapcott's (1986) typology of Australian study centres is reported: regional outreach centres; institution-based centres of two types - a

network of campuses, and resources offered by one institution to distance education students of other institutions; community based centres of two types - located within a community facility, and established by a distance teaching institution with local community involvement in its management. The costs of study centres of one Australian institution are given. Reasons given by students for visiting centres are reported, and the events and facilities desired by those students are compared with those thought necessary by institutions.

King, Bruce. 1988. *Possible directions for the support of distance students in Australian higher education.* University House, Canberra.

King claims that distance education in 1988 recognized that its students needed support through regular human contact, but that in the following ten years that support would come from central teaching institutions increasingly with study centres as such passing away. Their place may be taken by entrepreneurial educational agencies. There are two kinds of support offered within distance education: "universal" support which is largely administrative in nature and largely serves institutional ends, and "individual" support which is course-specific and directed to meeting student needs. There is also "direct" and "indirect" support, the former being that initiated by the institution and the latter that facilitated by the institution but not directly provided. Centrally provided and locally provided services are categorized and the nature of support is itemized. Ways are suggested by which study centres may be justified even though they may further benefit those students living in urban (and therefore "richer" educationally) areas. The heart of successful study centre operations is claimed to be the tutorial provision for academic advisement, and advances in communication technology will diminish and then remove the need for study centres to offer this contact.

Meakin Denys, 1982. *The Role of Regional Centres, Learning at a distance.* Athabasca University/I.C.C.E., Edmonton.

A strong system of student support was planned from the beginning by the Open Learning Institute of British Columbia, because it was believed to be the key factor in achieving high completion rates. Regional centres staffed by advisers were established having four main roles: general counselling and admission; providing information on the Open Learning Institute; communication with Open Learning Institute for students, and the provision of administrative advice and special facilities such as laboratories and study skills assistance; liaison between Open Learning Institute and the local community including educational institutions.

The regional centres were to control and co-ordinate "satellite centres" which would service smaller communities staffed part-time with persons working out of their own homes perhaps.

Salter Don, 1982. *Mobile Learning Centres in an Open Learning System, Learning at a distance*. Athabasca University/I.C.C.E., Edmonton.

North Island College on Vancouver Island has learning centres in all the larger towns of its region (which includes part of the mainland of British Columbia north of Vancouver). The centres consist of one or more rooms or a whole building usually rented in a central downtown location.

They contain meeting and study spaces, library and audio-visual resources, laboratory facilities and equipment, computers and other educational hardware and software. The centres are staffed by tutors and non-professional support. To service more remote settlements the college has mobile units. The furnishing and equipment of these units is described as is their mode of operation.

Smith K.C., and Small I.W. 1982. *Student support: How much is enough, Learning at a distance.* Athabasca University/I.C.C.E., Edmonton.

The authors maintain that the notion of learning as a social experience is not given sufficient consideration in distance education systems that emphasize the production of learning packages for completely independent learning. For the University of New England the notion of the University as a community of scholars is still important and emphasis is placed on personal interaction in all its respects. Local support and advisory services are needed but a difficulty of providing them through a comprehensive system of study centres arises from the scattered nature of the location of external students.

Where viable groups of students enrolled in common courses are located within a reasonable radius, centres should be established. The Sydney Centre of the University of New England, located in the central business district, was run for its first year (1980) by an external graduate student voluntarily, in its second year by a paid, part-time liaison officer, and subsequently by a full-time liaison officer.

Walker Mike, 1982. *Local support for the local learner, Learning at a distance.* Athabasca University/I.C.C.E., Edmonton.

Because the structure of most courses offered externally in Australia is a translation of on-campus courses, support for distance learners seeks to replicate as far as possible the on-campus system especially in its "social" and "ritual" components.

Most study centres are maintained by single institutions as "shop fronts". A logical development would be from institute study centres to regional centres maintained by regions and utilized by all institutions. Walker lists features of regional centres categorized by

structure, physical presence, strategic functions, and tactical functions, based on the Tasmanian experience.

Sewart, D., 1981. *Distance teaching: a contradiction in terms? Teaching at a distance,* No. 19, pp. 8-18.

Sewart advocates the term "distance learning" rather than "distance teaching" and a student-based approach to distance education. An intermediary concerned with the general welfare of the student is needed between the student and the teaching institution. However well it may be designed, the package of study materials cannot supply the advice/support to suit the needs of each individual student learning at a distance. While United Kingdom Open University packages of materials are acknowledged as being of high quality, the success of the U.K.O.U. (in terms of student retention, performance, and on-going demand) depends on the integration of the teaching packages with the advice/support system. This system has two main parts, correspondence tuition (teaching through marker-comments on assignments), and the work of tutor-counsellors and specialist tuition. A rationale for study centres is sketched and the differences between the actual use made by students of the U.K.O.U. centres and the university's assumptions of their uses are outlined. Study centres are elements in the richness, variety, and multiplicity of provision offered by the U.K.O.U. to its students and justify their existence as expressions of that richness.

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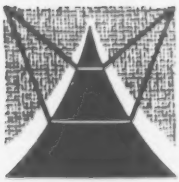

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